

## Chapter 1



*Top of North Pack Monadnock*

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## The Purpose of and Need for Action

- Introduction
- The Purpose of and Need for the Proposed Action
- The Service and the Refuge System Policies and Mandates Guiding our Planning
- Conservation Plans and Initiatives Guiding the Project
- Refuge Establishment Purposes and its Land Acquisition History
- Refuge Administration
- Refuge Operational Plans (“Step-down” Plans)
- Refuge Vision Statement and Goals
- The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process
- Issues
- Issues Outside the Scope of this Analysis or Not Completely Within the Jurisdiction of the Service

## Introduction

The Wapack National Wildlife Refuge became the first national wildlife refuge in New Hampshire in 1972, when Laurence and Lorna Marshall donated land to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). The terms of their deed prohibit hunting, fishing and trapping, cutting trees (except for maintaining trails), or driving motorized vehicles. It also requires us to manage the refuge in a “wilderness-like” setting.

This 1,625 acre refuge was established with the purpose to protect migratory birds. It encompasses the 2,278-foot North Pack Monadnock Mountain in the towns of Greenfield and Temple (see map 1–1). Many people visit the refuge to hike its three trails, including a 4-mile section of the Wapack Trail, which passes over the top of the mountain and offers outstanding opportunities for viewing migratory hawks. Wapack refuge is administered by staff from the Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Newington, New Hampshire.

This draft comprehensive conservation plan (CCP) and environmental assessment (EA) for the refuge combines two documents, each required by federal law: a CCP, required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1996 (16 U.S.C. 668dd–668ee), as amended by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Refuge Improvement Act) (Pub. L. 105-57; 111 Stat. 1253); and an EA, required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.; 83 Stat. 852).

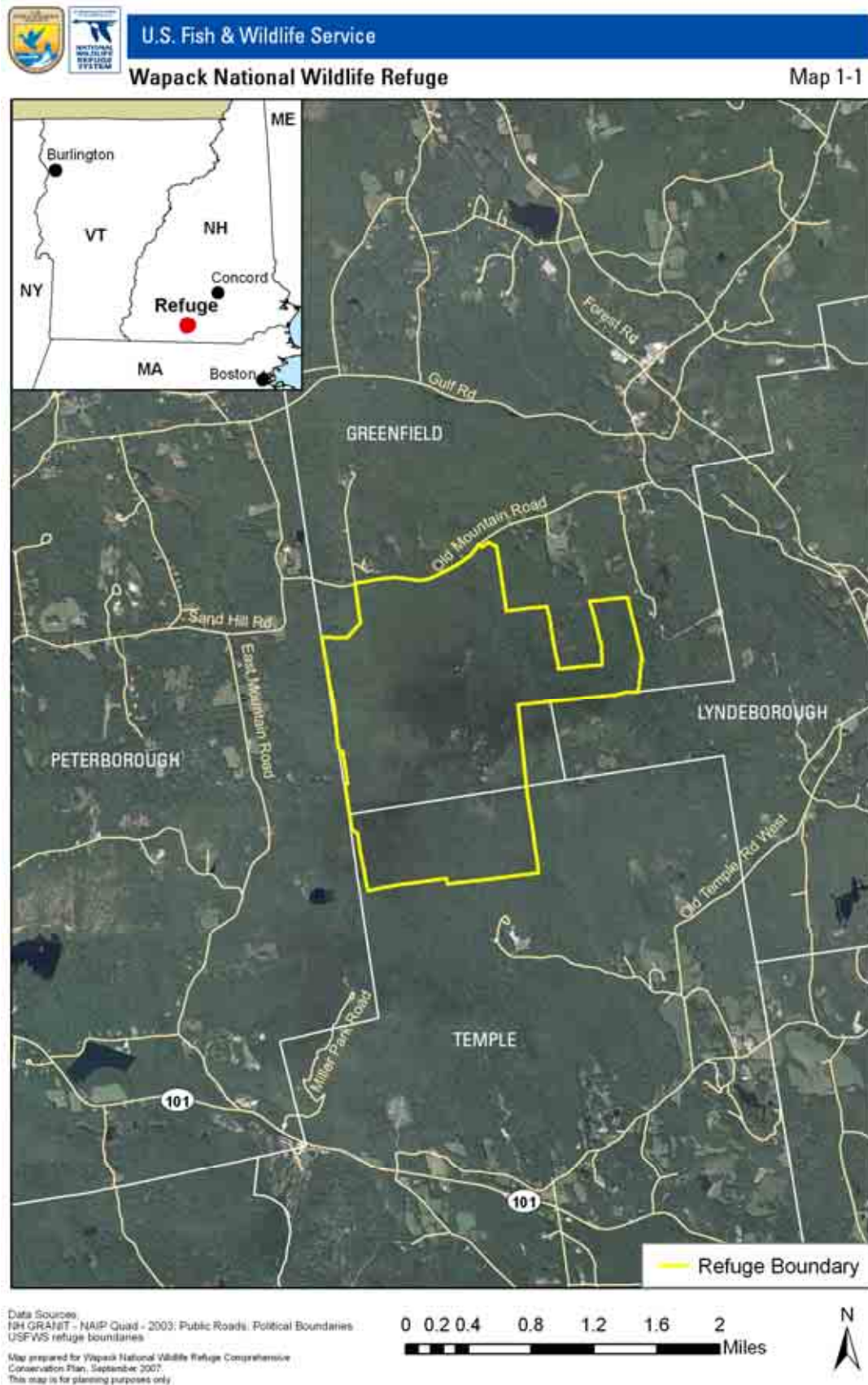
This chapter explains the purpose of and need for preparing a CCP/EA, and sets the stage for four subsequent chapters and four appendixes. It also

- defines our planning analysis area;
- presents the mission, policies and mandates affecting the development of the plan;
- identifies other conservation plans we used as references;
- lists the purposes for which we established the refuge and its land acquisition history;
- clarifies the vision and goals that drive refuge management;
- describes our planning process and its compliance with NEPA regulations; and,
- identifies public issues or concerns that surfaced in developing the plan.

Chapter 2, “Alternatives Considered, Including the Service-preferred Alternative,” presents two management alternatives, each with different strategies for meeting refuge goals and objectives and addressing agency, partner, and public issues. After the public review of this draft CCP/EA, our regional director’s decision on its management alternatives will produce a final CCP to guide refuge management decisions during the next 15 years. We will also use it to promote understanding and support for refuge management among state agencies in New Hampshire, our conservation partners, local communities and the public.

Chapter 3, “Affected Environment,” describes the physical, biological, and human environment of the refuge.

Chapter 4, “Environmental Consequences,” evaluates the effects on the environment from implementing each of the two management alternatives. That is, it describes their foreseeable benefits and consequences for the socioeconomic, physical, cultural, and biological environments described in chapter 3.



Chapter 5, “Consultation and Coordination with Others and List of Preparers,” tells how we involved the public and our partners in the planning process and credits this plan’s contributors. Four appendixes, a bibliography, and a glossary provide additional supporting documentation and references.

## The Purpose of and Need for the Proposed Action

We propose to develop a final CCP for the refuge that best achieves its purpose, vision, and goals; contributes to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (Refuge System); adheres to Service policies and other mandates; addresses significant issues; and, incorporates the sound principles of fish and wildlife science.

NEPA regulations require us to evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives, including our preferred action and “no-action.” The no-action alternative described in alternative A incorporates existing management practices. We did not consider among the range of reasonable alternatives either (1) continuing to manage the refuge without a CCP, or (2) not managing the refuge altogether, because each of those would require the Service to abdicate its statutory authorities and mandates.

The *purpose* of a CCP is to provide each refuge with strategic management direction for the next 15 years, by

- stating clearly the desired future conditions for refuge habitat, wildlife, visitor services, staffing, and facilities;
- explaining clearly to state agencies, refuge neighbors, visitors, and partners the reasons for our management actions;
- ensuring that our management of the refuge conforms to the policies and goals of the Refuge System and legal mandates;
- ensuring that present and future public uses are compatible with the purposes of the refuge;
- providing long-term continuity and direction in refuge management; and,
- justifying budget requests for staffing, operating and maintenance funds.

We identify several reasons as the *need* for this CCP. First, the Refuge Improvement Act requires us to write a CCP for every national wildlife refuge to help fulfill the mission of the Refuge System. Second, the Wapack refuge lacks a master plan to accomplish the purposes above. The need for a strategic plan is even more compelling because this is an unstaffed refuge, and we rely heavily on informal agreements with partners to assist in managing it. The proposals in this plan reflect the input of natural resource agencies in New Hampshire, affected communities, individuals and organizations, our partners, and the public.

## The Service and the Refuge System Policies and Mandates Guiding our Planning

### The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and its Mission

The Service is part of the Department of the Interior. Our mission is *“Working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.”*

Congress entrusts to the Service the conservation and protection of these national natural resources: migratory birds and fish, federal-listed threatened or endangered species, inter-jurisdictional fish, wetlands, certain marine mammals, and national wildlife refuges. We also enforce federal wildlife laws and international treaties on importing and exporting wildlife, assist states with their fish and wildlife programs, and help other countries develop their conservation programs.

The Service manual, available online at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/manuals>, contains the standing and continuing directives on fulfilling our responsibilities. The 600 series of the Service manual addresses land use management: sections 601–609 specifically address the management of national wildlife refuges.

We publish special directives that affect the rights of citizens or the authorities of other agencies separately in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR); the Service manual does not duplicate them (see 50 CFR 1–99 online at <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/index.html>).

## **The National Wildlife Refuge System and its Mission and Policies**

The Refuge System is the world's largest collection of lands and waters set aside specifically for the conservation of wildlife and the protection of ecosystems. More than 548 national wildlife refuges encompass more than 97 million acres of lands and waters in all 50 states and several island territories. Each year, more than 40 million visitors hunt, fish, observe and photograph wildlife, or participate in environmental education and interpretation on refuges.

In 1997, President William Jefferson Clinton signed into law the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (Refuge Improvement Act). It establishes a unifying mission for the Refuge System.

*“The mission of the System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”—Refuge Improvement Act; Public Law 105-57*

It also establishes a new process for determining the compatibility of public uses on refuges, and requires us to prepare a CCP for each refuge. The act states that the Refuge System must focus on wildlife conservation. It also states that the mission of the Refuge System and the purposes for which each refuge was established will provide the principal management direction on that refuge.

The Refuge System Manual contains policy governing the operation and management of the Refuge System that the Service Manual does not cover, including technical information on implementing refuge policies and guidelines on enforcing laws. You can review that manual at refuge headquarters. These a few noteworthy policies affect this CCP.

### ***Policy on Refuge System Planning***

This policy (602 FW 1, 2, and 3) establishes the requirements and guidance for Refuge System planning, including CCPs and step-down management plans. It states that we will manage all refuges in accordance with an approved CCP that, when implemented, will help

- achieve refuge purposes;
- fulfill the Refuge System mission;
- maintain and, where appropriate, restore the ecological integrity of each refuge and the Refuge System;
- achieve the goals of the National Wilderness Preservation System and the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System; and,
- conform to other mandates.

The planning policy provides guidance, systematic direction, and minimum requirements for developing all CCPs, and provides a systematic decision-making process to fulfill those requirements. Among them, we are to review any existing special designation areas for their potential for such designations (e.g., wilderness and wild and scenic rivers), and incorporate a summary of those reviews into each CCP (602 FW 3).

### ***Policy on the Appropriateness of Refuge Uses***

Federal law and Service policy protect the Refuge System from inappropriate or harmful human activities, and ensure that visitors can enjoy its lands and waters. This policy (603 FW 1) provides a national framework for determining appropriate refuge uses and preventing or eliminating those that should not occur in the Refuge System. It describes the initial decision-making process the refuge manager follows when first considering whether to allow a proposed use. An appropriate use must meet at least one of the following four conditions.

1. The use is a wildlife-dependent recreational use, as identified in the Refuge Improvement Act.
2. The use contributes to fulfilling the purpose(s) of the refuge, the mission of the Refuge System, or the goals or objectives described in a refuge management plan approved after October 9, 1997, the date the Refuge Improvement Act became law.
3. The use involves the taking of fish and wildlife under State regulations.
4. The use has been found to be appropriate at the conclusion of a specified process that uses 10 criteria. You may view that policy online at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/library/06-5645.pdf>.

### ***Policy on Compatibility***

This policy (603 FW 2) complements the appropriateness policy. The refuge manager first must find a use appropriate before reviewing its compatibility. If the proposed use is inappropriate, the refuge manager will not allow it, and will not prepare a compatibility determination.

You may view this policy and its regulations online at <http://policy.fws.gov/library/00fr62483.pdf>, including a description of the process and the requirements for conducting compatibility reviews. Our summary follows.

- The Refuge Improvement Act and its regulations require an affirmative finding by the refuge manager on the compatibility of a public use before we allow it on a national wildlife refuge.
- A compatible use is one “that will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the Refuge System or the purposes of the refuge.”—Refuge Improvement Act
- The act defines six wildlife-dependent uses that are to receive our enhanced consideration on refuges: hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.
- The refuge manager may authorize those priority uses on a refuge when they are compatible, and are consistent with public safety.
- A compatibility determination will stipulate the required maximum reevaluation dates: 15 years for wildlife-dependent recreational uses; or, 10 years for other uses.
- The refuge manager may reevaluate the compatibility of any use at any time: for example, sooner than its mandatory date or even before we complete the CCP process, if new information reveals unacceptable impacts or incompatibility with refuge purposes (602 FW 2.11, 2.12).
- The refuge manager may allow or deny any use, even one that is compatible, based on other considerations, such as public safety, policy, or available funding.

### ***Policy on Maintaining Biological Integrity, Diversity, and Environmental Health***

This policy provides guidance on maintaining or restoring the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge System, including the protection of a broad spectrum of fish, wildlife, and habitat resources in refuge ecosystems.



Biological integrity refers to the composition, structure, and functioning of the biota at the genetic, organism, and community levels, when compared with historic conditions. The policy defines biological diversity as the variety of life and its processes, including the variety of living organisms, the genetic differences among them, and the communities and ecosystems in which they occur. Environmental health refers to the composition, structure, and functioning of soil, water, air and other abiotic features compared with historic conditions.

The policy provides refuge managers with a process for evaluating the best management direction to prevent the additional degradation of environmental conditions and restore lost or severely degraded environmental components. It also provides guidelines for dealing with external threats to the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of a refuge and its ecosystem (601 FW 3). It is available at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/library/01fr3809.pdf>

### ***Other Mandates***

Other federal laws, executive orders, treaties, interstate compacts, and regulations on conserving and protecting natural and cultural resources also affect how we manage refuges. The centralized library of Service-wide policies, executive orders, director's orders, and the "Digest of Federal Resource Laws of Interest to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service" are available at <http://www.fws.gov/policy/>.

Federal laws also require the Service to identify and preserve its important historic structures, archaeological sites, and artifacts. NEPA mandates our consideration of cultural resources in planning federal actions. The Refuge Improvement Act requires that the CCP for each refuge identify its archaeological and cultural values. Highlights of some of those laws affecting CCP development and implementation follows.

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (Pub. L. 102-575; 16 U.S.C. 470) requires federal agencies to locate and protect historic resources—archaeological sites and historic structures eligible for listing or listed in the National Register of Historic Places, and museum property—on their land or on land affected by their activities. It also requires agencies to establish a program for those activities and carry them out in consultation with State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs).

The NHPA also charges federal agencies with locating and evaluating sites on their land and nominating them for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. We maintain an inventory of known archaeological sites and historic structures in the Northeast Regional Office, and file copies at each refuge. Our regional historic preservation officer in Hadley, Massachusetts, oversees our compliance with the NHPA and our consultations with state SHPOs. We must also comply with the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (Pub. L. 96-95, 16 U.S.C. 470aa-mm). It requires that we protect our archaeological sites from vandalism or looting and issue permits for site excavation.

The Service also owns and cares for museum properties. The most common are archaeological, zoological and botanical collections, art, and historical photographs or objects. Each refuge maintains an inventory of its museum property. Our museum property coordinator in Hadley, Massachusetts, guides the refuges in caring for that property, and helps us comply with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (25 U.S.C. 3001, et seq.) and federal regulations governing federal archaeological collections. Our program ensures that Service collections will continue to be available to the public for learning and research.

Chapter 4, "Environmental Consequences," evaluates this plan's compliance with the cultural and historic acts cited above, the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and Endangered Species Act. As we mentioned previously, we developed this draft CCP/EA to comply with NEPA.

## Conservation Plans and Initiatives Guiding the Project

### Birds of Conservation Concern 2002 Report

The Service developed this report (USFWS 2002) in consultation with the leaders of ongoing bird conservation initiatives and partnerships such as Partners In Flight (PIF), the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) and Joint Ventures, the North American Waterbird Conservation Plan (NAWCP), and the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan. The report fulfills the mandate of the 1988 amendment to the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. §§2901, et seq.), which requires the Secretary of the Interior to “identify species, subspecies, and populations of all migratory non-game birds that, without additional conservation actions, are likely to become candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.”

The 2002 report contains 45 lists that identify bird species of conservation concern at national, regional, and landscape scales. It includes a principal national list, seven regional lists corresponding to the seven regional administrative units of the Service, and species lists for each of the 37 Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) designated by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI) in the United States. NABCI defined those BCRs as ecologically based units in a framework for planning, implementing, and evaluating bird conservation. The refuge lies in the Atlantic Northern Forest BCR 14 (see additional discussion below).

Our agency’s overarching goal in developing that report is to stimulate federal, state, and private agencies to coordinate, develop, and implement integrated approaches for conserving and managing the birds most in need of conservation. The report is available online at <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/reports/BCC2002.pdf>.

### Atlantic Northern Forest Bird Conservation Region Blueprint (BCR 14)

The Atlantic Coast Joint Venture partnership created its “Blueprint for the Design and Delivery of Bird Conservation in the Atlantic Northern Forest” (2003 draft and its update), in response to the NABCI challenge of building on existing partnerships to plan, implement, and evaluate cooperative bird conservation across North America. You may read the entire text of that document online at [http://www.acjv.org/documents/bcr14\\_blueprint.pdf](http://www.acjv.org/documents/bcr14_blueprint.pdf). It presents a strategic design of the key components that this BCR initiative will need to maintain healthy populations of birds native to the Atlantic Northern Forest (BCR 14). Specifically, it establishes a series of goals for moving BCR 14 toward a vision of sustained bird populations; it presents the biological foundation for its recommendations; and, it lays out a framework for implementing and evaluating those (Dettmers 2004).

The blueprint for BCR 14 identifies 53 bird species designated “highest” or “high” conservation priority in the region and 15 habitat types important for supporting one or more of those priority bird species during at least one of their life stages. Seven of the 53 highest and high-priority species have been observed on the refuge. The habitats identified either need critical conservation attention, or are crucial in long-term planning to conserve continentally and regionally important bird populations. The refuge offers 3 of the 15 priority habitat types. We considered each of those species and habitats in writing appendix C, “Species and Habitats of Conservation Concern,” and in developing our objectives and strategies for goal 1.

### Partners In Flight Bird Conservation Plans

In 1990, PIF began as a voluntary, international coalition of government agencies, conservation organizations, academic institutions, private industries, and citizens dedicated to reversing the population declines of bird species and “keeping common birds common.” The foundation of its long-term strategy is a series of scientifically based bird conservation plans using physiographic areas as planning units.

The goal of each PIF plan is to ensure the long-term maintenance of healthy populations of native birds, primarily non-game birds. The plan for each physiographic area ranks its bird species according to their



conservation priority, describes their desired habitat conditions, develops biological objectives, and recommends conservation measures. That priority ranking also factors in habitat loss, population trends, and the vulnerability of a species and its habitats to regional and local threats.

***Physiographic Area 27—Northern New England (June 2000 Draft).***—Our planning area lies in Physiographic Area 27, Northern New England. In developing our habitat goals and objectives, we referred to its draft plan, now online at [http://www.blm.gov/wildlife/plan/pl\\_27\\_10.pdf](http://www.blm.gov/wildlife/plan/pl_27_10.pdf). That plan (Rosenberg and Hodgman 2000) includes objectives for the following habitat types and associated species of conservation concern on the refuge.

- *Northern hardwood and mixed forest:* black-throated blue warbler, Canada warbler, and blackburnian warbler; and,
- *Mature conifer (spruce-fir) forest:* blackburnian warbler, bay-breasted warbler, sharp-shinned hawk.

### **Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, National State Agency Herpetological Conservation Report (Draft 2004)**

Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) was created in response to the increasing, well-documented national declines in amphibian and reptile populations. PARC members come from state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, museums, the pet trade industry, nature centers, zoos, the power industry, universities, herpetological organizations, research laboratories, forest industries and environmental consultants. Its five geographic regions—Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest and Northwest—focus on national and regional herpetofaunal conservation challenges. Regional working groups allow for region-specific communication.

The National State Agency Herpetological Conservation Report (NHCR), a summary report sponsored by PARC, provides a general overview of each state wildlife agency's support for reptile and amphibian conservation and research through September 2004. Each state report was compiled in cooperation with its agency's lead biologist on herpetofaunal conservation. The purpose is to facilitate communication among state agencies and partner organizations throughout the PARC network to identify and address regional and national herpetological priorities.

PARC intends to expand the scope of the NHCR to include other states, provinces, and territories. It will also include other state agencies that are supporting herpetofaunal conservation and research, such as transportation departments, park departments, and forest agencies. New Hampshire has completed reports included in the NHCR online at <http://www.parcplace.org/documents/PARCNationalStates2004.pdf>. The next NHCR will integrate the list of species of conservation concern from each state's wildlife action plan (see below). We used the latest draft NHCR plan in developing appendix C, "Species and Habitats of Conservation Concern."

### **New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, Wildlife Action Plan (WAP 2005)**

In 2002, Congress created the State Wildlife Grant Program (SWG), and appropriated \$80 million in state grants. The purpose of the program is to help state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies conserve fish and wildlife species of greatest conservation need. The funds appropriated under the program are allocated to the states according to a formula that takes into account their size and population.

To be eligible for additional federal grants, and to satisfy the requirements for participating in the SWG program, each state and territory was to develop its "Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy" (CWCS) and submit it to the National Advisory Acceptance Team by October 1, 2005. Each strategy was to address eight required elements, identify and focus on "species of greatest conservation need," yet address the "full array of wildlife" and wildlife-related issues, and "keep common species common."

The New Hampshire plan (NHFG 2005) resulted from that charge. The goal of the plan is to create a vision for conserving the state's wildlife and stimulate other state agencies, federal agencies, and conservation partners to think strategically about their individual and coordinated roles in prioritizing conservation.

In addressing the eight elements below, New Hampshire's WAP supplements and validates the information on species and habitat and their distribution in our planning analysis area, and helps us identify conservation threats and management strategies for species and habitats of conservation concern in this CCP. The expertise and the partner and public involvement that compiled the plan further enhance its benefit for us. We used it in developing the objectives and strategies for goal 1. These are the eight elements.

1. Information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations, as the state fish and wildlife agency deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of the state's wildlife.
2. Descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to the conservation of species identified in element 1.
3. Descriptions of problems that may adversely affect species identified in element 1 or their habitats, and priority research and survey efforts needed to identify factors that may assist in restoration and improved conservation of these species and habitats.
4. Descriptions of conservation actions necessary to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions.
5. Plans proposed for monitoring species identified in element 1 and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in element 4, and for adapting those conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions.
6. Descriptions of procedures to review the plan at intervals not to exceed 10 years.
7. Plans for coordinating, to the extent feasible, the development, implementation, review, and revision of the plan strategy with federal, state, and local agencies and Native American tribes that manage significant areas of land and water within the state, or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats.
8. Plans for involving the public in the development and implementation of plan strategies.

### Other Regional Information Sources

We also consulted the plans and resources below as we refined our management objectives and strategies.

- New Hampshire Big Game Plan, 2006; available online at [http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/Hunting/Hunting\\_PDFs/NH\\_Big\\_Game\\_Plan\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/Hunting/Hunting_PDFs/NH_Big_Game_Plan_FINAL.pdf)
- Society for the Protection of NH Forests, New Hampshire's Changing Landscape, 2005; available online at <http://www.spnhf.org/research/research-projects.asp#nhcl>
- New Hampshire Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, 2003; available online at <http://www.nh.gov/oepp/programs/SCORP/documents/scorpweb.pdf>

### Refuge Establishment Purposes and its Land Acquisition History

With the first donation of 738 acres of land in 1972, we established the refuge for the following purpose and under the following authority: "for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds" (Migratory Bird Conservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 715d).

In 1977, another donated tract totaling 934 acres increased the size of the refuge to 1,672 acres. A final land survey in 1998 adjusted the refuge boundary line, excluding the town of Lyndeborough. That adjustment resulted in a loss of 47 acres. The refuge now comprises 1,625 acres.

## Refuge Administration

The refuge manager at the Great Bay refuge in Newington, NH, administers the unstaffed Wapack refuge. The 2006 Regional Strategic Downsizing Plan includes the decision to de-staff the Great Bay refuge and administer both it and the Wapack refuge from the Parker River refuge in Newburyport, MA. We expect to implement that downsizing and administrative change in 2008.

## Refuge Operational Plans ("Step-down" Plans)

Refuge planning policy lists more than 25 step-down management plans that generally are required on refuges. Those plans contain specific strategies and implementation schedules for achieving refuge goals and objectives. Some plans require annual revisions; others require revision every 5 to 10 years. Some require additional NEPA analysis, public involvement, and compatibility determinations before we can implement them.

In 2005, we completed a Fire Management Plan for the Great Bay refuge that incorporated strategies for Wapack refuge. No other step-down plans are current.

## Refuge Vision Statement and Goals

### Refuge Vision Statement

Very early in the planning process, our team developed this vision statement to provide a guiding philosophy and sense of purpose in the CCP.

*"Encompassing the North Pack Monadnock Mountain in southern New Hampshire, the Wapack National Wildlife Refuge provides exceptional mature spruce-fir and northern hardwood-mixed habitat for wildlife, particularly migratory birds. We will manage the refuge to preserve its natural conditions in a setting that appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature."*

*All visitors are welcome to enjoy opportunities to observe and photograph nature along refuge trails, including a 4-mile segment of the Wapack Trail. The rock outcrop and cliff on the mountain peak afford an ideal location to view migrating hawks each fall. Old and new partnerships with other federal agencies, state agencies, local conservation organizations, and volunteers will foster public stewardship of this refuge and its resources, and enhance public understanding of the role of the National Wildlife Refuge System in conserving our nation's trust resources."*

### Refuge Goals

We developed these goals after considering our vision and the purposes of the refuge, the missions of the Service and the Refuge System, and the mandates, plans, and conservation initiatives above. These goals are intentionally broad, descriptive statements of purpose. They highlight the elements of our vision for the refuge we will emphasize in its future management. The biological goals take precedence; but otherwise, we do not present them in any particular order. Each offers background information on its importance. In chapter 2, "Alternatives Considered, Including the Service-preferred Alternative," we evaluate different ways of achieving these goals.

**Goal 1.** Allow natural processes and disturbances to enhance biological diversity and integrity of upland wildlife habitat.

**Goal 2.** Establish a public use program that will encourage compatible, low-impact recreation on refuge trails.

**Goal 3.** Enhance the conservation and stewardship of wildlife resources through partnerships with public and private conservation groups, private landowners, State agencies and local entities.

## The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

Service policy establishes an eight-step planning process that also facilitates our compliance with NEPA (figure 1.1).<sup>1</sup> Our planning policy and CCP training course materials describe those steps in detail. We followed that process in developing this draft CCP/EA.

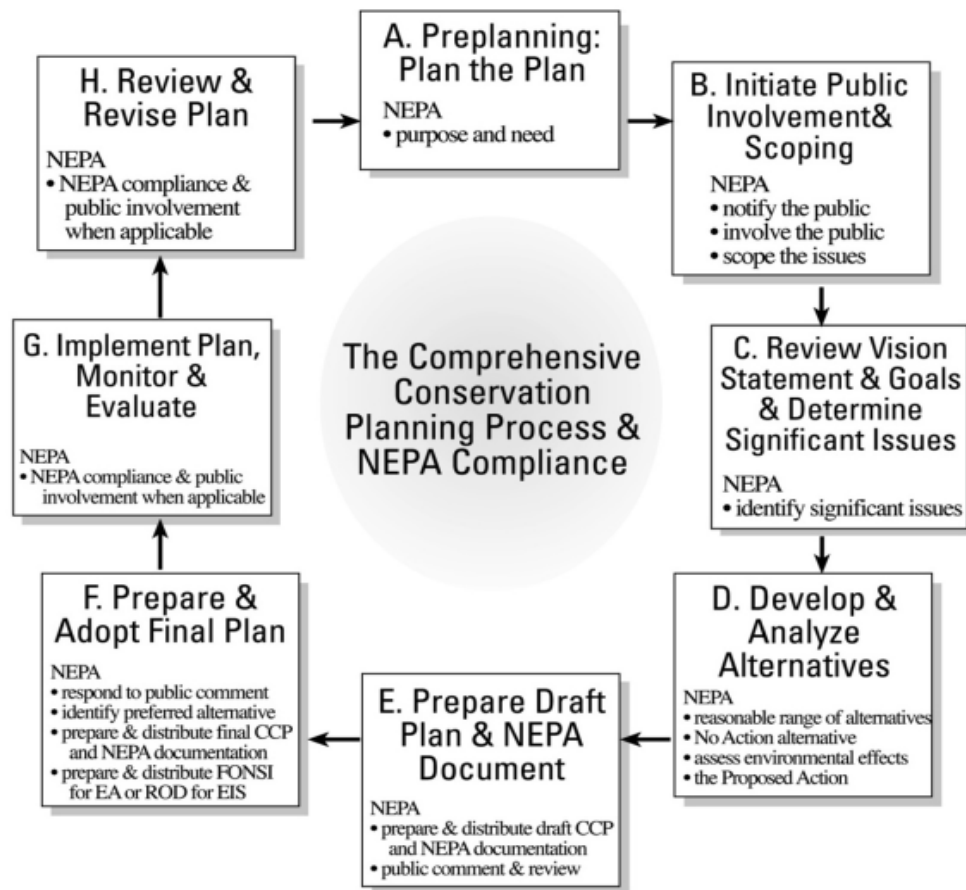


Figure 1.1. The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

Since the first donation of land in 1972, we have focused on managing the refuge as the deed requires, with minimal intervention, as in a wilderness area. We prohibit hunting, fish, trapping, cutting trees, and using motor vehicles.

In January 2007, we began to prepare for the CCP by collecting information about resources on the refuge and by requesting available information from surrounding conservation landowners (e.g., Miller State Park, Joanne Bass Bross Preserve). Graduate students from the Conway School of Landscape Design in Conway, MA, participated in that project from January to March 2007.

<sup>1</sup> 602 FW 3, "The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process" (<http://policy.fws.gov/602fw3.html>)

In February 2007, we convened our core team, which consists of refuge staff, regional office staff, and representatives of the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department (NHFG) and the New Hampshire Department of Recreation and Economic Development (NH DRED), Division of Parks and Recreation. We discussed management issues, drafted a vision statement and goals, and compiled a project mailing list of known stakeholders, interested individuals, organizations, and agencies. We initiated all of those steps as part of NEPA Step A; “Preplanning” (figure 1.1, above).

In February 2007, we began NEPA Step B, “Initiate Public Involvement and Scoping,” by publishing a newsletter to announce that we were starting the planning process, and to encourage community involvement. We also worked concurrently on Step C, “Review Vision Statement, Goals, and Identify Significant Issues.” On February 23, 2007, we formally published the start of the planning process in a Federal Register Notice of Intent (NOI). We also announced one public scoping meeting in Peterborough to identify public issues and concerns, share our draft vision statement and tentative goals, describe the planning process, and explain how people could become involved in and stay informed about that process. The twenty-six people who attended helped us identify the public concerns we would need to address in the planning process.

During March 2007 we reviewed the public comments received at meeting and via email and regular mail to firm up our key issues. We also reviewed our draft vision and goals and made some refinements. This completed Step C, “Review Vision, Goals and Determine Issues.” Next, we moved right into Step D, “Develop and Analyze Alternatives.” The purpose of this step is to develop alternative objectives and strategies for addressing the issues and achieving the goals. Our preliminary ideas were presented at a second public meeting on March 6, 2007. We then worked from March to August 2007 to finalize our proposals to serve as a foundation for this draft CCP/EA. In November 2007, we distributed a newsletter summarizing the alternatives in detail and updating our planning timeframes.

We completed Step E, “Prepare Draft Plan and NEPA document,” by publishing our Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register, announcing the release of this draft CCP/EA and distributing it for public review. During the 30-day period of public review, we will hold a public hearing to obtain comments. We also expect to receive comments by regular mail or electronic mail. After the comment period expires, we will review and summarize all of the comments we have received, develop our responses, and present them in an appendix to the final CCP.

Once we have prepared the final CCP, our regional director will determine whether it addresses all significant issues and our analysis was adequate. If he agrees with our analysis, and concludes that there are no significant impacts and compliance with federal laws and mandates is complete, he will issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), and approve our final plan. That will complete Step F, “Prepare and Adopt a Final Plan.” Then we can begin Step G, “Implement Plan, Monitor and Evaluate.”

We will modify the final CCP by following the procedures in Service policy (602 FW 1, 3, and 4) and NEPA requirements as part of Step H, “Review and Revise Plan.” Minor revisions that meet the criteria for categorical exclusions (550 FW 3.3C) will require only an environmental action memorandum. We must revise each CCP fully every 15 years. We may revisit the compatibility determinations that accompany it even sooner than that mandatory date, or even before we complete the CCP process, if new information reveals unacceptable impacts or incompatibility with refuge purposes.

## Issues

During the scoping process, our partners and the public brought to our attention the issues they wanted us to address. We identified others in our planning team discussions. Initially, we distinguished between those issues whose resolution lies within the jurisdiction of the Service, and those that either lie outside the scope of this analysis or do not fall completely within Service jurisdiction. We summarize those in a separate section below.

Our discussion of the issues within Service jurisdiction generated a wide range of opinions on how to resolve them. How we will treat them creates the primary distinctions among the objectives and strategies in each alternative in chapter 2. A more detailed description of those issues follows.

### ***Biological Surveys***

Because the Wapack refuge is unstaffed, no one is available onsite to conduct biological surveys. Our limited budgets also make it difficult to contract those surveys to other organizations or individuals. Members of the community not only are concerned over the lack of biological surveys, but also want us to publish or make available, present and future refuge biological information.

### ***Active Management for Forest Habitat***

Some members of the public suggested that the Service manipulate habitat to provide more habitat diversity for wildlife species on the refuge. They also expressed an interest in reducing mature forest cover through selective cutting and prescribed burning, to attract more species of mammals (e.g., moose, bobcat) to the refuge.

Some suggested that the refuge establish clearings by cutting selectively along the trail, to provide better birding and viewing at the top of the mountain. We heard that tree growth is obscuring those views.

One person also expressed an interest in our actively managing refuge habitat to maintain blueberry bushes; they cannot survive under heavy shade. Annual or biannual selective cutting or prescribed burning would be necessary to remove that shade and promote the growth of blueberries. The deed of donation restricts any tree cutting on the refuge, except as necessary for maintaining trails.

### ***Invasive Species***

The establishment and spread of invasive species, particularly invasive plants, is a significant problem that spreads across all types of habitat. For this discussion, we use the definition of invasive species in the Service Manual (620 FW 1.4E): “Invasive species are alien species whose introduction [causes] or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm, or harm to human health. Alien species, or non-indigenous species, are species that are not native to a particular ecosystem. We are prohibited by executive order, law, and policy from authorizing, funding, or carrying out actions that are likely to cause or promote the introduction or spread of invasive species in the United States or elsewhere.”

The unchecked spread of invasive plants threatens the biological diversity, integrity and environmental health of all refuge habitats. In many cases, because of their competitive advantage over native plants, they form dominant cover types, thus reducing the availability of native plants as food and cover for wildlife. Over the past several decades, government agencies, conservation organizations, and the public have become more acutely aware of the negative effects of invasive species. Many plans, strategies, and initiatives target the more effective management of invasive species, including *The National Strategy for Management of Invasive Species* for the Refuge System (USFWS 2003c) and *Silent Invasion—A Call to Action*, by the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA 2002). The Refuge System biological discussion database and relevant workshops continually provide new information and updates on recent advances in control techniques. Funding sources to conduct inventory and control programs also have grown, both within the Service budget and through competitive grants.

### ***Trail Maintenance***

The 4-mile section of the Wapack Trail that runs through the refuge is often difficult to maintain due to the rocky terrain. That terrain and the unsure footing of the trail may also create a safety issue for refuge visitors. The compaction of soil and vegetation can increase runoff and, consequently, increase erosion. In trying to circumvent problem areas, people have created braided trail sections and stream crossings.

### ***Establishment of New Trails***

When we established the refuge, only the 4-mile segment of the Wapack Trail and the 1.1-mile Cliff Trail were recognized. Since then, local residents have created two new trails: Ted's and Carolyn's trails (3 miles of their total 5.15 miles run on the refuge). We are concerned that other trails may be established without the consultation or knowledge of the Service.

### ***Trailhead Access to the Northern End of the Refuge***

The only way that visitors can access the northern end of the refuge now is by parking on the road shoulder of Old Mountain Road. Parking there can be problematic for several reasons. First, on many weekends, not enough parking is available for all the visitors who want access to the refuge. Because of the limited space for cars, visitors often park in unsafe areas. Once visitors have parked, they must walk along the road to access the trailhead. That creates another safety concern about traffic on the road. Parking on that road also creates a problem for the Town of Greenfield's Department of Transportation. In the winter, cars parked on the side of the already narrow road make clearing it safely even more difficult for snowplows. The Town of Greenfield is very concerned about this recurring problem, and wants us to work with them in solving it.

### ***Minimal Service Presence on the Refuge***

Our limited staff and funding have prevented us from improving the visibility and presence of the Service at the refuge and in the local community. Only one sign, erected by the Friends of the Wapack (FOW), shows a topographic map at the trailhead (the northern end of the refuge). It shows the layout of the Wapack Trail, but does not provide any information about the refuge (e.g., the refuge boundary, Service contact information, or refuge rules and regulations). We posted the refuge boundary with standard Refuge System "blue goose" signs; however, those are the only signs that notify the public they are on a national wildlife refuge.

### ***Dog Walking***

Before this CCP, we had not decided whether to allow leashed dogs on the refuge. Technically, without a finding of appropriateness or determination of compatibility, dog walking is prohibited on the refuge. However, our limited staff has been unable to enforce that prohibition, and many refuge visitors are unaware that the activity is prohibited. Consequently, many dogs have been seen on the refuge. During several visits this spring and summer, we observed dogs roaming freely without leashes on the refuge trail.

The public expressed an interest in dog walking on the refuge. Many would be satisfied with adhering to a regulation allowing only leashed dogs on the refuge. Others would like us to allow unleashed dogs that are under the command and control of their owners. Everyone we spoke with stated that prohibiting dog walking altogether on the refuge would create confusion when users of the Wapack Trail walk north from other areas, (e.g., Miller State Park), where dog walking on leash is allowed.

### ***Illegal Camping***

No camping is allowed on the refuge. Members of the FOW have seen evidence of camping on the refuge, but recently that evidence has decreased. The minimal Service presence makes it difficult to monitor the area regularly for illegal camping and enforce the "no camping" restriction.

### ***Illegal Hunting***

The deed restricts any form of hunting on the refuge. Landowners nearby have complained of hearing gunshots in the refuge area during the hunting season. In response, they called local wardens of the state game division, with whom we have a partnership agreement. Again, the minimal Service presence makes it difficult to monitor the area regularly for illegal hunting. Members of the community would like to see more law enforcement officials (whether state or federal) patrolling the area, particularly during the hunting season.



### ***Refuge Expansion***

Several members of the public suggested that the Service consider expanding the refuge to create better linkage with other conservation land areas. Some were interested specifically in acquiring adjacent, lower elevation habitat, including old farm fields. They believe this protection would ensure the support of a greater diversity of wildlife. Please refer to “Refuge Expansion” in chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion.

### **Issues Outside the Scope of this Analysis or Not Completely Within the Jurisdiction of the Service**

#### ***Giving or transferring refuge lands to other local conservation organizations***

Members of the public suggested that the Service transfer or give the refuge or refuge management authority to a state or local conservation organization. They are concerned that the Service is unable to manage the refuge effectively due to its limited staff and budget. Some feel that other conservation groups would do a better job of managing refuge resources and improving the visitor experience.

We have no plans to assign staff permanently to this refuge, as other regional priorities and current fiscal conditions prevent us from doing so. On the other hand, we plan to make several improvements to the refuge (under alternative B) through enhanced partnerships and cooperation with other federal agencies, local conservation groups, and the public. Those proposals will promote better stewardship of the refuge and raise the visibility and public awareness of its resources.

Although some suggest that we transfer or donate the refuge to another conservation entity, the deed prohibits us from doing so. Furthermore, the Service can only relinquish lands it owns in fee through a land exchange, legislation, or the disposal or transfer of excess property under the Transfer of Certain Real Property for Wildlife Conservation Purposes Act of 1948. For example, the Service can dispose of refuge lands only after congressional legislation requires it, or because the agency determines that those lands are excess to its needs and no longer serve the mission of the Refuge System or the purposes for which the refuge was established. The Service can also exchange refuge land for land of equal market value and equal or higher natural resource value. An equalization payment would settle any difference in value.

In summary, unless directed by congressional legislation to initiate a disposal or exchange process, the Service would have to determine that the land of the Wapack refuge no longer contributes to the conservation of migratory birds and, in the case of an exchange, that the agency would gain land more important to our federal trust resources. In our professional judgment, that determination is unwarranted.